

## Preface

*"We are the ones who will put the policies and practices in place in our schools that enable all young people their emotional and social selves welcomed, their spirits uplifted, and their inner lives nourished as a normal, natural part of their education."*

*Linda Lantieri, Founding Director, Resolving Conflict Creatively Program  
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In recent years, Iowans, as others across the nation, have intensified their efforts to make their schools safe in response to the series of tragic events in schools. This handbook is intended to provide guidance to and a "one-stop shop" resource for those charged with keeping our children safe while they are at school and on their journeys to and from school. Unlike documents produced by others that limit their focus to emergency/crisis procedures, this handbook provides information on a full continuum of programs and services that range from prevention to early intervention to emergency management at times of crises. In addition, it includes in one place a collection of Federal and State documents that have been distributed over the last several years.

Although typical reactions to the recent incidents of violence may be that "it can't happen here," or "you cannot prepare enough to prevent such incidents." In fact, the recent occurrences of school violence happened in suburban and small rural predominately white communities, rather than in those communities known for violence and high crime rates. Actually, there is an interesting paradox that while school violence and in-school weapons are down; students, teachers, and administrators feel less safe. One of the best ways to address these perceptions is to take action. The National School Board Association's National Education Policy Network, in an article in its *Updating* newsletter (June/July, 1998), encourages educators to challenge traditional approaches to school safety by focusing on creating environments that are secure in the short term and designed to effect behavioral changes in the long term.

The goal, after all, of safe school planning is to create and maintain safe and orderly schools that are positive and welcoming and free of drugs, violence, intimidation, and fear – environments where teachers can teach and students can learn. Establishing a safe school plan is a long-term, systematic, and comprehensive process. However, school safety is not and should not be viewed solely as a school-based problem, nor will any single intervention be effective in combating school violence. Rather, any strategy to deter school violence must be multi-faceted, comprehensive, and a coordinated effort that involves schools, students and their parents, and communities.

There are countless strategies that schools can adopt to prevent, prepare for, and manage crisis situations. Many of these strategies are included in the pages to follow in this handbook. Each school must identify its own needs and choose strategies that are best suited to address these needs in the context in which they will be implemented.

Some of the best advances in violence prevention come through the early identification of those youth most at risk of committing it.

May this handbook serve as a valuable resource that can -

- be used to guide planning;
- be referenced at times of need;
- serve as a repository for district and building plans; and
- be kept up to date with the latest in policy, research- and evidence-based strategies for creating safe schools.

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